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The Hero From *the West* Gets Modern Girls' Mitten

Young Woman Whose New Ideas and Strange Unconventionalities Give Concern to Grave Professors and Lawmakers Turns from the Breezy Ideal of the Plains to the Chap With the Gloves and Cane and Spats, Who Knows the Amenities and Appeal of Gallantries

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NOT so long ago he came thundering out of the sunset like a rugged young god of the outdoors, caring little for conventions that were current east of the Mississippi and fascinating the world he differed from because of his very difference.

I am, as you of course know, speaking of the man who a few years back reigned on the hero throne of American fiction. Sad to say his dynasty has crumbled into the selfsame dust that most heroes spring from, and to-day he no longer holds the favor of that fair court which creates from time to time new and popular man types for hero worship. His coming and going between book covers as the popularly accepted Lochinvar of fiction demands at least a few words before I turn to his successor, who is now for the sake of spice and psychology a white collared product of the effete East.

Primarily it is the picturesque and romantic that lends greatest charm to fiction. Realizing this, a clever writer living in the days when street cars were not so plentiful and automobiles were considerably less a menace to human life than now followed the unbeaten trail to find a knightly sort of male somebody. He found him down in the shadows of the canyoned Sierras rounding up wild horses on the plains, ranching, blazing trails to new places and ideals, sleeping out under the stars, making his own laws and winning his woman by the sheer force of his man self. This writer dubbed him "a man's man" and promptly waved the magic wand of fiction over him. Very soon this clean limbed chap of the West with his blunt ways and frank tongue, his ability to ride wild ponies and make men do his way, became "a woman's man." Woman, intrigued by his very artlessness and virile masculinity, clamored to make him a hero, and she succeeded. From the seclusion of his wild and open spaces he was thus dragged into the spotlight.

All of this was some time ago when out where the West begins was quite a different place from what it is to-day—days when hoof tracks across the plains constituted a road and when people were pioneers, not tourists. When the railroad train superseded the prairie schooner and cities sprang up in the places of settlements the original Western hero type with his picturesque sombrero and blue flannel shirt folded his tent and, like his environment, faded reluctantly away.

But fiction readers were loath even then to see their Western type of man entirely erased out of the picture. "Surely his new generation must have some of his fresh, invigorating heroic qualities?" whispered the readers, and the writers listening in heard and answered "Yes" with loud acclaim. So we passed from the blue shirted gun toting Westerner to the man out there who was building that vast section into something akin to the pattern of the East, albeit a bigger, more rugged scheme of life and living that smacked of the free winds from the Rockies and the salt tang of the Pacific.

This man was still, like his father, "a man's man" even if he believed in bungalow comforts as opposed to log cabins. As such he found himself heroized in print. He was advertised on the cover jackets of the books written about him and in the magazines and newspapers as "a man with all of the freedom of the open West who will bring into your lives some of his own compelling vigor and ideals culled fresh from the philosophy man creates for himself, unfettered by the shackles of a superficial existence," and so on read the sales

arguments in favor of books on the subject of the popular Western hero.

Why has he been dethroned? And where is he spending his exile?

Will he ever come back?

These are questions which might engage our attention interestingly for a time. But of the three I shall deal with only the first. In answering this question I am giving you an opinion based on my observation as a writer and reader regarding the reasons which have been instrumental in bringing about the psychological causes responsible for his downfall.

To begin with, heroes are really only created to be looked up to and worshipped. As long as a certain type of hero fascinates or holds in thrall the worshippers he remains a fixed star. However, the moment he begins to lag in heroic qualities he becomes a shooting star and is doomed to headlong flight and a bump against earth, Mars or some other planet. Consequently after fiction readers became "fed up," to use a current expletive, with the breezy unconventionality of the Westerner who was forever dashing into places where winged creatures feared to intrude and whose greatest hobby was wearing soft shirts and collars where other men were costumed according to fashion books, they began to look elsewhere for a man to share their moonlight and soft music moods.

The Westerner who admitted he was too big and clumsy to dance and all that kind of stuff paled with the fair sex after the novelty of his unconventionality had worn off. And of course the other Westerner who was a counterpart of the suave Easterner with only a difference of accent didn't count in the matter at all.

About this time even this country with all of its vastness and greatness was about done with the kind of pioneering and adventurous days such as brought forth the original Western fiction hero. There were no more unmapped forest regions of tall timber, no more green seas of waving grass, no more country of squatter law to depend upon for types. Novelists began to scratch their heads and puzzle for a new type of American hero.

In saying a new type I mean what the word implies, a classified sort of group, any one of which has a great deal in common with the other, not an individual kind of hero. Of course this latter kind usually stand apart as characters and there are always a few exceptional novelists who can write fiction that does not have to hew to the story built around a hero type for its popularity or success. We are not dealing with such personalities in fiction. We have to do with type alone, for that is one of the surest indications of the pulse beat of a nation.

Fortunately the men and women who write for a living were not forced to burn up their inventive faculties in an effort to create or discover a new hero type for best sellers. A subtle revolution going on in the hearts and fancies of our American girls for almost ten years suddenly burst into flames and, presto, we saw before us the type of man who to-day is first in fiction and first in the hearts of his countrywomen.

To me he is such an obvious chap that he really needs very little introduction. You see him all around you these fine spring days. He wears very collegiate or sport clothes. In most cases he is a clean cut sort of young American, a bit precocious, to be sure, but at that generally having something worthwhile to listen to. This young fellow with his city bred ways and ideas is an adept at the dance. He has all of the social graces. On the surface he may appear to be an amusement seeker in life, and as a matter of strict truth he is fundamentally an amusement seeker in this his crystallizing stage. Always equipped with enough poise to carry him through any situation, he sometimes seems brazen to those of an older generation.

He believes in different codes and creeds concerning many vital things which have agitated his father and mother during the past decade. For instance, he says to his mother, "Oh, why not let Sis smoke cigarettes if she wants to?" His ideas of having a good time are quite foreign to those his father had at his age.

But—
For all of these things that mark him a distinct type from his predecessor in fiction he is a hero in his own way and quite as picturesque a person as could be expected to live in an age so productive of efficiency and multiplied horse-power. He is a hero not by virtue of his own declaration but because he is the chosen male type of that most irrepressible and unusual force in our social life to-day—the young modern American girl.

The modern American girl has had many things blamed upon her, the craze for bobbed hair being among the least and most unimportant when one considers the statement recently made by a woman well known as a reformist and an advocate of

blue laws. "Our modern girl, sometimes called the flapper, the shifter and a lot of other uncomplimentary names, is dashing around the country in knee skirts, smoking one pack of cigarettes after another, drinking cocktails, talking loosely and in the long run thinning out the blood of real old fashioned womanhood," declared this lady on a lecture platform.

Already saddled with the responsibility of what the reformist attributes to her, the girl of to-day will not think me very chivalrous by adding to her burden the blame for having made the effete, divan minded young chap of to-day the hero that he is in current fiction and life. Not that I believe all or any of the things that the woman quoted to be true. However, there is one thing certain and that is our modern girl has demanded this type of hero in real life and he must necessarily come into his own as such in fiction. For after all fiction only glamorizes life in most cases.

The only way to find out the truth of such matters is to get a closeup of the American girl at play to-day (her enemies say she is never otherwise than at play). She must be danced with—not in a commonplace fashion. On the contrary, she must be led over the ballroom floor by a partner who gracefully executes all the latest jazz steps or else she drops him and seeks one who is an adept. She does not stay at home any more and enjoy the old fashioned kind of engagements with mother sewing in the room beyond. Instead she meets her date for tea or dinner at an appointed rendezvous. Or together they go dashing off in a car or to some cabaret or club.

Now get the psychology of this. The modern American girl has, with the aid of conditions, circumstances, environment, changing viewpoints and conventions, made herself voluntarily into the species we find her to-day. She is not quite the "old lace and lavender" type of yesterday that was interested in the knightly kind of man, the dreamer, the bold adventurer

and so on. She is the personification of what we call in the argot of the moment a "snappy age." She may have her languid, dreamy moments when romance bids her dream of silvery seas and quiet pearly shores in some unknown part of the world.

But such moments pass in flashes and she is back again in the world she knows and loves best, the world where saxophones and automobile horns play a heavy part. Now in order to enjoy this kind of life that seems the demand of a second nature she must of necessity have some man or youth who fits into her scheme of things as the heroic figure.

Isn't it a trifle simple after all to see where our young fiction hero of to-day gets his entrance cue from? Certainly the young woman of to-day speaks the lines that herald his coming. She wants him because he is her mood, her kind.

To analyze this sparkling young female creature and to outline all of the psychological changes that brought her to the point where she demands the white collar man is far beyond the pale of this article.

The point to wit is this: The American girl of to-day having revolutionized herself and sisters in thought, speech and actions turned away from the type of man whom her new demands relegated to the discard of obsolete heroes and looked with favor upon the product of her influence and age—the smooth faced, carefree youth who may not be all that the term "double fisted" implies but who is consistently capable of giving her a good time and seeing things from her viewpoint.

Perhaps you may say that these arguments apply only to the young girls and men so engrossed in having a youthful fling that they have not reached a sober thinking age. As a matter of fact they actually apply to the universally accepted type of man hero nowadays whatever his age may be.

Readers are no longer thrilled by the "too rough and ready" sort of chap who can do little else than reveal muscles hardened and toughened by contact with the primal things of life. To-day the hero must be first of all a man who mingles in the best of social circles with ease. At least he must know something about the niceties in life as well as the rough edges. Women in real life no longer care to be made conspicuous in public or at parties

because of the uncouthness of their partners. The novelty of dining with a big, sun tanned man who leaves his spoon in the coffee cup or stretches at the table holds no more of glamour.

Underlying all of the reasons enumerated here for the popularity of the present type in life and fiction is a fact which is little considered and thought of by the vast majority of persons who have interested themselves in the nomadic comings and goings of varying fiction hero types.

Let us go back a few years ago, say, to 1916. At this time we were not at war with Germany. There were very few and limited ways for the men of this country to reveal any outstanding heroic qualities. Everybody lived about the same sort of unadventurous life. The policemen and firemen were perhaps the only ones who ever had a continuous opportunity to do the spectacular and sensational kind of hero stuff, and yet we never look upon their exploits as heroic. Whatever they do seems taken for granted, as if expected. So the country was not producing much heroism at the time and the fellows who generally make the best heroes were just plodding along or playing along as the case might have been.

Then came the war! The playfellows and the plodders put on olive drab. Millions of them drilled and bent their energies toward becoming soldiers for one great purpose. Hundreds of thousands went overseas. Then came the mud, the grim shell battered lines, the starving, thirsting moments. Gas, wounds, heroism, death and the armistice.

So it was that millions of our young fellows proved they were heroes at heart, waiting only for a chance to show themselves. Those who came back are many of the young men who wear the clothes and act the part of the more effete type of man. And yet our girls and women who time and time again set up new gods in the world of fiction know that these same chaps are heroes in their belted models and dinner coats when Chateau-Thierry and the Argonne woods are remembered.

Being a revolution in herself, it is not surprising that the modern American girl became insurgent about hero types both real and imaginary. So it is that with deliberate and capable hands she has reached up and taken down the old, perhaps the most romantic in a way, and set up her little clay idol who now lives to the tune of "My Hero" both in the realms of reality and worded imagery.

